



Taking Action on Racial Equity and Justice

Learning Challenge Series — Health Challenges Guide

Help Shape a Healthier Society



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[Help Shape a Healthier Society Discussion Guide >](#)



[Help Shape a Healthier Society Workbook >](#)

This Health Challenges Guide accompanies the Help Shape a Healthier Society Discussion Guide and Workbook. Please be sure to take advantage of these helpful resources as you approach the solution to your challenge!

Note: These mini challenges are designed to help you make changes in your daily life, and are not intended to substitute for the advice of a medical professional or serve as a tool for self-diagnosis. However, if you find yourself overwhelmed, are dealing with more complex issues, or are uncertain about your ability to safely complete certain challenges, you may want to consult your healthcare provider or a mental health professional.

A Healthier Society Starts with You



Good personal health is key to a positive community life. As we all work to address health disparities in our communities, taking small steps to work on your own health can make a big impact on the world. This guide features mini challenges that can help you make a difference. You can use the Challenge Based Learning framework outlined on page 5 of the [Help Shape a Healthier Society Discussion Guide](#) to help you as you approach these challenges.

Engage

The decisions you make about your health affect the people around you. But starting to make healthy choices can be hard. To help you connect with the big idea of health, the challenges in this guide can inspire you to focus on your mental health, eat well, and get active.

Investigate


This guide contains 8 mini challenges and 32 guiding activities, each with guiding questions to help you get started. Think about what you want to achieve and how you want to get there, then investigate answers to the questions listed with each activity. Ask additional questions to help generate changes that will positively impact you or your broader community.

Act

Create a plan for working on your mini challenge. The more detailed and specific you make your plan, the more likely you'll be able to follow through. The length of time you work on your challenge is up to you — it could be a day, a week, or longer. The number of times you put it into practice during that time is also up to you. You can use the challenges by yourself, with friends, or with family.

Tell Your Story

Reflect on strategies that work. Social media is a great place to share what you've done to make a change in your health or the health of your community. When sharing, use [#ChallengeForChange](#) to spread the word and inspire others to take action.



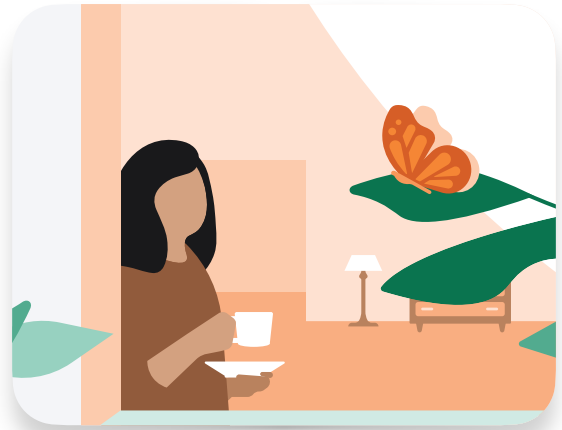
Support Mental Health

Practice the Positive

Make small changes to shift your mindset.

Guiding Activities

1. **Keep a Gratitude Journal:** Write down what you're grateful for.
2. **Try a Smile:** Elevate your mood with a grin.
3. **Treat Yourself:** Do something that you enjoy.
4. **Take a Moment:** Learn a calming technique.

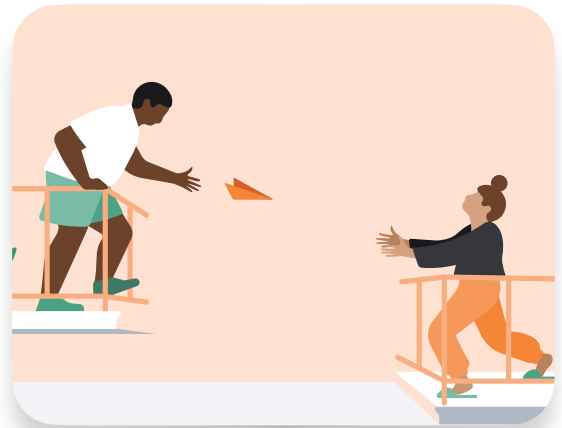


Pay It Forward

Care for your community to help you care for yourself.

Guiding Activities

1. **Do a Random Act of Kindness:** Commit to a small gesture of goodwill.
2. **Be Thankful:** Show appreciation for the people in your life.
3. **Give Back:** Donate to a cause you care about.
4. **Lend Your Time and Attention:** Bond with a person you care about.



Manage Stress in Your Daily Life

Use different tools to handle pressure-filled situations whenever they pop up.

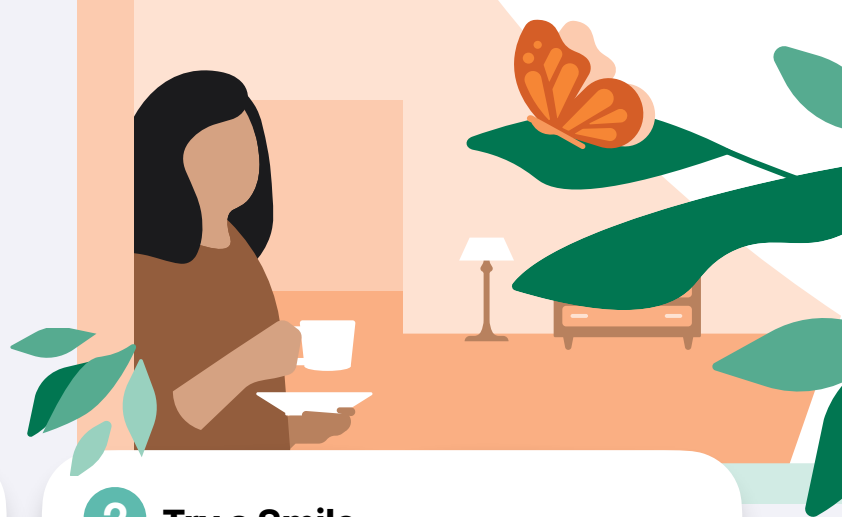
Guiding Activities

1. **Practice Mindfulness:** Work on finding inner calm.
2. **Change Your Thinking:** Shift your perspective.
3. **Work It Out by Working Out:** Reset with exercise.
4. **Track Your Stress Triggers:** List the things that cause you stress.



Practice the Positive

Make small changes to shift your mindset.



1 Keep a Gratitude Journal

How It Works

Write down things that you're grateful for — friends and family, a delicious meal, a garden you saw on a walk, or even characteristics about yourself.

Why It's Helpful

Studies show that paying attention to things you're thankful for — both big and small — can shift how you see the world. This perspective can be helpful when you're coping with negativity, stress, or challenging times.

Guiding Questions

- Not sure how to get started? Think about things you enjoy during the day, like seeing your pet when you wake up or having dinner with people you love.
- What's your plan? Consider what time of day you want to write and how many things you want to write about.

2 Try a Smile

How It Works

Commit to intentionally smiling — or just moving your smile muscles — a certain number of times each day.

Why It's Helpful

It's normal not to smile when you're not feeling happy. But research shows that when you move your mouth into the shape of a smile, you can diffuse tension in your face and trick your brain into thinking you're happier. This mood lift can help alleviate stress.

Guiding Questions

- What will you use as a smile cue? You could smile whenever you stand up or when you see your reflection.
- How many times a day will you try to intentionally smile?
- What do you notice about how you feel before and after you smile?

3 Treat Yourself

How It Works

Practice the positive by taking part in activities that bring you joy. This doesn't need to be a huge commitment of your time or resources, but allow yourself the time to do something you love — even if it's five minutes of listening to music or calling a friend to catch up.

Why It's Helpful

It's easy to get bogged down by demands at home, work, or school. By making time for things you enjoy, you can start to feel more in charge of your days and experience something positive through these activities.

Guiding Questions

- What kinds of activities feel like a treat? These could be group activities like pick-up basketball or solo activities like reading a book. Make a list so you have options.
- What day or days this week will you treat yourself?

4 Take a Moment

How It Works

You can't always anticipate when stress or a negative emotion will show up, but you can plan ahead by finding techniques to help you manage them better.

Why It's Helpful

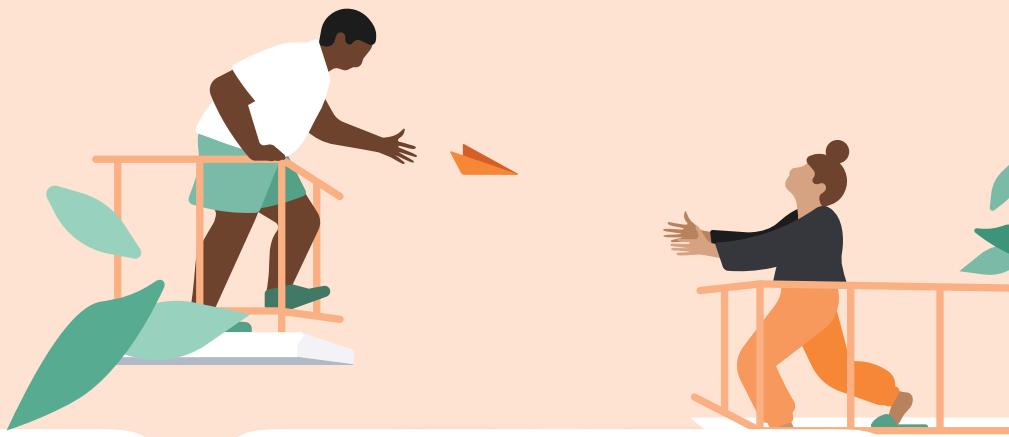
The more tools you have to cope with stress and anxiety, the more quickly you'll be able to calm your brain and body. This allows you to remain more focused and productive so you don't get caught up in negative emotions.

Guiding Questions

- What could you do when you feel overwhelmed? One idea is to take three deep breaths.
- What positive phrase could you repeat in your mind? For instance, "There's no obstacle I can't overcome."
- How do you feel after taking a moment for yourself?

Pay It Forward

Care for your community to help you care for yourself.



1 Do a Random Act of Kindness

How It Works

Doing a nice gesture — whether big or small — for someone else can feel good. It could be picking up a neighbor's groceries or letting someone know you notice how hard they're working.

Why It's Helpful

When you're stressed or overwhelmed, it's easy to focus on those feelings. By turning your attention outward to others, you can begin to perceive the world in new ways. Small moments can give way to larger shifts in your mood and your ability to manage stress — and you'll brighten someone else's day.

Guiding Questions

- Who are some people you'd like to offer a compliment or word of encouragement to?
- How could you share kindness with strangers — maybe by smiling, holding a door, or giving up your bus seat?

2 Be Thankful

How It Works

Tell the people around you that you appreciate them. This could be telling a classmate that you really enjoyed working with them on a recent group project or texting your friend to say, "I'm glad you're in my life."

Why It's Helpful

Even if we feel grateful for people in our lives, we might not think to let them know. Brighten someone's day by telling them what you value, admire, or appreciate about them and their role in your life.

Guiding Questions

- What's your style for thanking others? A short text? A handwritten note? A fist bump, high five, or hug?
- Who are you grateful for? Who do you admire? Make a list of these people, and plan to let them know.

3 Give Back

How It Works

Donate your time or money to a cause that matters to you, like a children's charity or a local food bank. Open your mind to what you might learn from others' experiences.

Why It's Helpful

By giving back to your community, you can start to see the world through a different lens — and create new possibilities in your own life.

Guiding Questions

- What organization would you like to start donating your time, money, or expertise to?
- Who in your family, circle of friends, or community really needs your time and attention right now? Showing up is a great way to give back.

4 Lend Your Time and Attention

How It Works

Choose a person in your life, and spend meaningful time together.

Why It's Helpful

In a busy world, it's vital not only to take time for yourself but also to cultivate your relationships. Humans are social, and we get many benefits from spending time together, including emotional support, more validation, and generally better health.

Guiding Questions

- Who do you wish you spent more time with? Give the person a call, or plan a time to hang out with them.
- Who have you not talked to in a while? Reach out with a text or call to reconnect.

Manage Stress in Your Daily Life

Use different tools to handle pressure-filled situations whenever they pop up.



1 Practice Mindfulness

How It Works

Developed by Dr. Tara Brach, **R.A.I.N.** is a set of four mindfulness techniques: **Recognize** what you're feeling, both in your body and in your environment; **Allow** yourself to be in the moment, and try not to fight your feelings or explain them away; **Investigate** what's making you uncomfortable; **Nurture** yourself by letting your feelings come and go. Using even one technique can help in situations like tense conversations.

Why It's Helpful

Understanding your reactions to stressful situations and not judging your feelings can help you find calm in your current state and manage your feelings in the future.

Guiding Question

- Which approach works best for you? Trying one technique at a time or trying all of them in sequence?
- In what situations would these techniques be most helpful?

2 Change Your Thinking

How It Works

When you feel negative thoughts start to spiral, adjust your thinking to help shift your perspective. Remind yourself that the situation is temporary. You can even look for humor in the moment.

Why It's Helpful

Disrupting negative thinking can set you on a path to improved mental wellness. Think of your strategy for reframing a situation like throwing a rock in a stream, which immediately reroutes the flow of water.

Guiding Questions

- What are some situations where you find yourself caught in negative thinking?
- What word or phrase could you use to reframe a situation? For example, you could say to yourself, "This will pass" or "This is tough, but I'm tougher."

3 Work It Out by Working Out

How It Works

Choose an activity like biking, walking, or yoga stretches to do when you feel stressed. Other ideas: Lift weights or heavy objects around the house. Do jumping jacks, squats, or lunges. Try tricep dips using a chair.

Why It's Helpful

When you're stressed, your heart rate goes up. But when you raise that level with physical activity, you can help reset your body and lower your levels of stress hormones. You can then return to your situation with a clear head and a better mindset.

Guiding Questions

- What kinds of exercise might help you reset and feel less stressed?
- How do you feel after workouts, even if they're only a few minutes long?

4 Track Your Stress Triggers

How It Works

When something causes you stress, like being late for a class or meeting or having a heavy workload, take note of it and how it makes you feel physically.

Why It's Helpful

Tracking your responses to stress helps you learn more about your behavior patterns. This will help you develop ways to manage overwhelming feelings in the future.

Guiding Questions

- How do you want to track your stress triggers? For example, you could write them down, use an app on your phone, or record a voice memo.
- What kinds of situations feel especially stressful for you — loud sounds or bright lights? Feeling rushed? Being in crowds? Being alone?

Eat Well

Change Up Your Food Choices

Make small adjustments to what you eat to change how you feel, both physically and emotionally.

Guiding Activities

1. **Extra Veggies, Please:** Increase your veggie intake.
2. **Get Creative with Salads:** Mix in a healthy new ingredient.
3. **Swap a Fried Food:** Choose the baked, grilled, or broiled option.
4. **Spice It Up:** Explore new flavors.



Eat Healthy When You're Short on Time

Try simple hacks to make better food choices.

Guiding Activities

1. **Play with Portions:** Opt for smaller servings at meal time.
2. **Supercharge Your Sides:** Pick something healthy instead of fries or bread.
3. **Plan Your Lunches:** Store them in individual ready-to-eat containers.
4. **Prep One Meal, Eat Many Times:** Prepare one dish that can last for days.

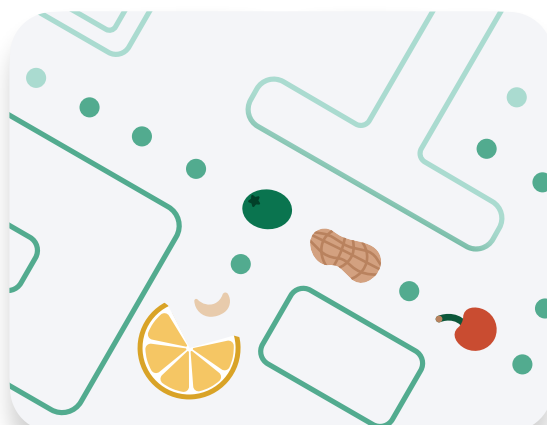


Prepare for a Snack Attack

Get that afternoon pick-me-up in a healthy way.

Guiding Activities

1. **Eat Fruit as a Sweet Treat:** Ditch the sugary snacks.
2. **Manage Your Snack Breaks:** Limit how often you reach for a snack.
3. **Try Something New:** Branch out with your morning or afternoon snack.
4. **Switch Up Your Snacks:** Swap one of your usual snacks for a healthier option.



Change Up Your Food Choices

Make small adjustments to what you eat to change how you feel, both physically and emotionally.

1 Extra Veggies, Please

How It Works

Adding a veggie or two — like spinach, carrots, or broccoli — to your regular meals is a great way to load up on the good stuff.

Why It's Helpful

Vegetables have lots of fiber and water, so they'll help you feel fuller sooner and stay satisfied longer.

Guiding Questions

- What are some of your favorite veggies? Or what vegetables do your family and friends love that you'd be interested in trying?
- What meal would be easiest to add veggies to? You could add spinach to an omelet at breakfast, load up a sandwich with lettuce, tomato, or sprouts for lunch, or have a side with your dinner.

2 Get Creative with Salads

How It Works

Mix your salads up by trying a new green vegetable, topping them with nuts and seeds for crunch, or adding an egg or fish for protein.

Why It's Helpful

If you're feeling bored with your salads, try new ingredients. Add bright colors with fruits and veggies or new textures with crunchy nuts or creamy avocados to give your regular mix a much-needed — and healthy — boost.

Guiding Questions

- What are some of your go-to salad ingredients? Knowing what you like is a great starting point.
- What's missing from salads that you find bland or boring? Are they all the same color? Missing something tangy or sweet? In need of something crunchy or creamy?

3 Swap a Fried Food

How It Works

Choose the baked, broiled, or grilled version of a dish over the battered and fried one.

Why It's Helpful

Fried foods can make you feel bloated and sluggish. When you replace fried foods with healthier versions, you're not only making positive strides for your health but also helping yourself feel better.

Guiding Questions

- What would make it easier to swap out a fried food? For example, could you look at the menu before going out to dinner so you don't simply order your usual?
- What are some creative ways to share your swaps with others in your community? For example, you could create a jump-cut video showing the food swap and share it on social media with a positive message.

4 Spice It Up

How It Works

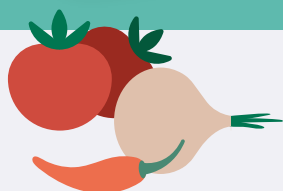
Salt is far from the only option for adding flavor to your meal. You have so many tasty possibilities!

Why It's Helpful

Exploring new flavors not only helps you cut back on salt but also lets you discover more ways to satisfy your palate with a wide range of herbs and seasonings.

Guiding Questions

- What dishes could benefit from fresh herbs like basil, thyme, or cilantro?
- What food could you sprinkle with pepper, garlic powder, or a squeeze of your favorite citrus for a punch of flavor?
- How could you add a pop of heat to your meal? Mix peppers, pickled spicy veggies, or chopped fresh ginger into stir-fries, soups, salads, or stews.



Eat Healthy When You're Short on Time

Try simple hacks to make better food choices.



1 Play with Portions

How It Works

You can enjoy many of your favorite foods, whether you're at home or dining out, and still improve your health by opting for smaller portions or saving some for later.

Why It's Helpful

Healthy eating isn't just about what we eat, it's about how much food we put on our plates, too. You can still enjoy the foods you love, just in smaller amounts.

Guiding Questions

- When are you most likely to eat more than you really need?
- What might help you disrupt that pattern? Eating from a smaller bowl or plate? Waiting a few minutes before getting seconds? Premeasuring portions for grab-and-go snacks?

2 Supercharge Your Sides

How It Works

Swap out fries or potatoes for a salad, veggies, or a side of fruit.

Why It's Helpful

Eating more nutrient-rich foods can help you increase your energy levels and improve your body's ability to fight off illness.

Guiding Questions

- What side would be easiest to swap out for something like steamed or mixed veggies? Sometimes it helps to start with easier changes.
- What side do you really enjoy that would be hard to switch out? Challenge yourself by trying to swap it once.

3 Plan Your Lunches

How It Works

Decide what you'll have for lunch next week, then make it and put it into individual ready-to-eat containers.

Why It's Helpful

In a busy world, it's often easier to eat out or order in than to prepare meals. But by doing a bit of prep work, you have more control over ingredients — and your health.

Guiding Questions

- How could you make sure you get everything you need for a week's worth of lunches? Make a grocery list of all your ingredients.
- How could you save time on food prep? You could try buffet-style prep, where you mix and match items to create new meals.
- What prechopped or prewashed food can you buy to save time?

4 Prep One Meal, Eat Many Times

How It Works

Choose a dish to prepare — like a healthy casserole, savory bean side, or hearty soup — and divide it into many meals.

Why It's Helpful

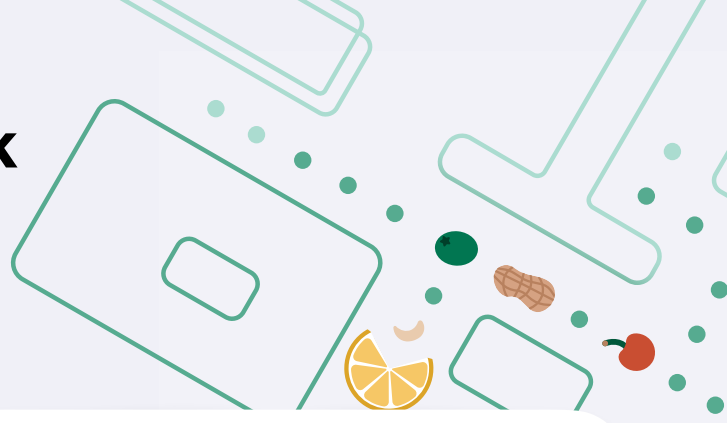
Making one item last for several meals is more reasonable and time efficient than cooking something new every day. And preparing your own food gives you more control over ingredients.

Guiding Questions

- Which favorite dinners could be good leftovers for use in your lunches?
- What foods could you cook for more than one meal? For a quick soup, you can toss rice or chicken, your favorite veggies, canned tomatoes, and beans into some broth.

Prepare for a Snack Attack

Get that afternoon pick-me-up in a healthy way.



1 Eat Fruit as a Sweet Treat

How It Works

Instead of reaching for a dessert-like snack, choose a delicious piece of fruit.

Why It's Helpful

Eating fruit is a great way to feed your sweet tooth and avoid processed sugar.

Guiding Questions

- Besides the sweetness, what else do you like about your favorite treats? The smooth, creamy texture of a fruit smoothie? The bright candy colors you see in a fruit salad with berries, mango, and pineapple?
- When do you most crave sweets? Plan to have fruit-based treats on hand for those times.
- List two fruits you'd like to eat as sweet treats this week. What makes these choices healthier than cookies or candy?

2 Manage Your Snack Breaks

How It Works

Cut back on snacks by eating them less often.

Why It's Helpful

Planning when you'll snack is a good way to keep from eating when you're bored or upset but not actually hungry.

Guiding Questions

- What time of day could you pick for eating a snack? Try to stick to your schedule.
- What's your game plan if you have a craving but it's not snack time? For example, you could try listening to music, drinking water instead of reaching for extra food, or keeping snacks out of sight to reduce temptation.

3 Try Something New

How It Works

Take a little food adventure by adding a new snack into your rotation.

Why It's Helpful

Trying new food is fun, even if you don't love it all! If you're looking for healthier ways to satisfy a salt craving, some great ideas to start with are crispy chickpeas, dried or roasted seaweed, or plantain chips. Or you can try hummus — a savory dip packed with protein — and double up on healthy foods by eating it with carrots, celery, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, or cucumbers.

Guiding Questions

- Which of your old snack routines would be easiest to change or give up?
- What flavors and textures make a snack a good — or not so good — choice to you?

4 Switch Up Your Snacks

How It Works

Pick a healthier snack, like veggies and hummus, berries and Greek yogurt, or fruit and low-sodium nuts. Some nut-free options include crunchy chickpeas, apple slices with cheese, and edamame.

Why It's Helpful

You can still eat some of your favorite snacks while adding in healthier options from time to time. By trying something other than your usual treats, you might discover a new favorite.

Guiding Questions

- What can you do if you have a sugar craving? One idea: snack on frozen grapes. Just put washed and dried grapes in a container, and toss them in the freezer for a few hours.
- What if you're in the mood for something salty? Turn your favorite hearty greens — like kale or collards — into chips by baking them in the oven.

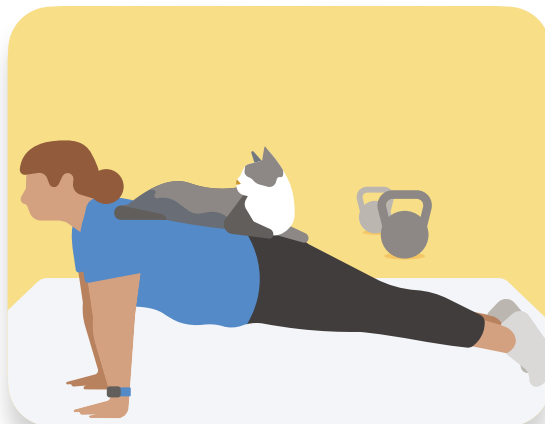
Get Active

Increase Your Activity

Step up your daily movement, exercise, and standing goals.

Guiding Activities

1. **Exercise More:** Add more exercise minutes to your routine.
2. **Stand Up:** Get up from your chair more often.
3. **Log More Miles:** Push yourself to go further.
4. **Make Time for Playtime:** Find something fun to do.



Take 5 . . . or 10

Squeeze in a quick workout for 5 or 10 minutes to do your body good.

Guiding Activities

1. **Take a Walk:** Fit a short walk in.
2. **HIIT the Circuit:** Try quick bursts of cardio exercises.
3. **Work (Out) from Home:** Turn your living room into a gym.
4. **Step Outside Your Comfort Zone:** Attempt an exercise you've never done.



Increase Your Activity

Step up your daily movement, exercise, and standing goals.

1 Exercise More

How It Works

Add more minutes of activity to your usual baseline.

Why It's Helpful

Increasing your amount of activity or exercise has many benefits — from strengthening your heart and improving your circulation to lowering your risk for high blood pressure and heart attacks. And it just makes you feel good.

Guiding Questions

- About how many minutes of exercise do you get most days? If you don't know, try using an exercise app on your phone or wearing a fitness-tracking device or step counter to set your baseline.
- How can you add exercise minutes to your day? Try parking in the back of the store parking lot, walking your dog an extra block, or doing sit-ups while watching your favorite show.

2 Stand Up

How It Works

Set a goal for how many times each hour you'll get up from your chair and move for at least one minute.

Why It's Helpful

Standing up and moving around disrupts the pattern of sitting for hours. Breaking that pattern allows you to stretch so your muscles don't feel stiff by the end of the day.

Guiding Questions

- How can you remind yourself to get up and move around? One idea is to set a timer on your watch or phone for every hour or half-hour.
- Which hours of the day might be easiest for you to get up and move around? Maybe between classes or meetings, during your lunch break, or before and after work or school?

3 Log More Miles

How It Works

Already a walker, runner, or cyclist? Try upping your distance. If you have an Apple Watch or another fitness-tracking app or device, use it to track your activity.

Why It's Helpful

Pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone is a great way to increase your fitness. You'll get a confidence boost from seeing how much more you can do and what your body is capable of.

Guiding Questions

- How could you add a few minutes of movement to your day? For example, get off the bus early to walk the rest of the way, or jog before breakfast or after dinner.
- How will you keep yourself accountable? Find a workout buddy to help motivate you.
- What could keep you entertained during extra exercise? Try an audiobook, podcast, or new music playlist.

4 Make Time for Playtime

How It Works

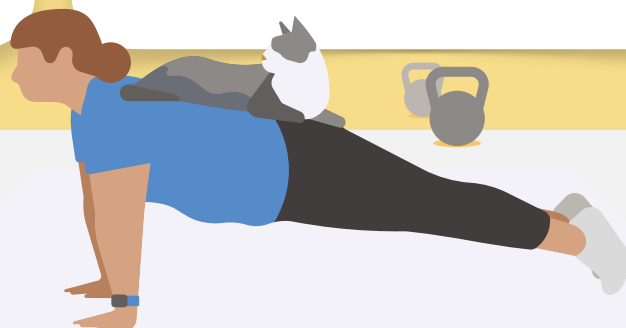
Do an activity that's fun and provides the benefits of exercise. For example, play soccer with your family, shoot hoops at the park, or play tennis with a friend.

Why It's Helpful

Research supports the idea that playtime is important for people of all ages. It offers not just physical benefits but also mental health benefits.

Guiding Questions

- What fun activities could you do that are also good for your health? Brainstorm by making a list.
- What are some ways you could get active with your community? It could be with just one friend or with a group of people.



Take 5 . . . or 10

Squeeze in a quick workout for 5 or 10 minutes to do your body good.

1 Take a Walk

How It Works

Exercise doesn't have to be a big ordeal or take up a lot of time. Get up and walk for 5 or 10 minutes — maybe during your lunch break or after school — when you need a boost of energy.

Why It's Helpful

Fitting in a few minutes of activity during the day is a great way to clear your head, reset, and increase your energy levels.

Guiding Questions

- What would be a good time to take a break from your routine to get a short walk in?
- How do you feel — both mentally and physically — before your short walk compared with after it?

2 HIIT the Circuit

How It Works

High-intensity interval training (HIIT) involves alternating short bursts of cardio exercise like burpees or mountain climbers with less-intense periods of recovery. Your heart rate goes up during the bursts, then comes down as you rest. Adding just 5 or 10 minutes of HIIT can make a difference.*

Why It's Helpful

These mini-workouts can burn more calories in less time than regular strength or endurance training while helping clear your mind and boost your energy.

Guiding Questions

- What are some of your favorite exercises to get your heart pumping faster?
- How does a mini-workout make you feel the rest of the day? Energized, relaxed, or more focused?

3 Work (Out) from Home

How It Works

You don't need a gym or equipment to add 5 or 10 minutes of back-to-basics exercises into your day. Think jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups, or squats.

Why It's Helpful

If you don't have time to go to the gym or to do a long workout, doing some quick basic exercises at home is a great way to stay active even on your busiest days.

Guiding Questions

- What items around your home can you use for your workout? Try water bottles or soup cans as weights or a jump rope for cardio.
- How might you get your family or roommates to join you in trying it out, even if just once? Working out with others can help motivate you and make it more fun.

4 Step Outside Your Comfort Zone

How It Works

Try a new exercise or workout, like riding a stationary bike at the gym or an online Pilates class. You don't have to invest a lot of time to see and feel a difference.

Why It's Helpful

Just 5 to 10 minutes of exercise can get your heart pumping. This helps you work out stress, clear your mind, and reset your day. You might find a new workout to add to your regular routine.

Guiding Questions

- What do you find most exciting about trying a new exercise or workout?
- What's kept you from trying something new? Make a plan to overcome those barriers. Asking someone to work out with you is one way to help conquer nerves.



*If high-intensity cardio exercise isn't part of your usual routine, you might want to consult with your healthcare provider about activity options that are best for you.

